

AT ST. GAUDENS' HOME, CORNISH, NEW HAMPSHIRE

"The appearance of everything was altered; there seemed to be, as it were, a calm, sweet cast, or appearance of divine glory, in almost everything."

-- Johnathon Edwards, Personal Narrative

1. vines will not enter this space a hand shaped
the sunlight shivers on the nearby leaves
at the second coming of Washington's polis
the hewn fields want to kiss my eyes to sleep
and steal my breath in one long slow yes
2. I chew a blade of grass and let the grass
taste me it tells me we are old comrades
the grass always speaks of its need to be stone
of mixing the eyes of young men and the breasts
of women then making a frieze in its studio
3. it recollects Gaudens' New Hampshire masque
and how the farmers up from Cornish wore togas
the republic of laurel molasses and petit fours
lived then was left behind like a party favor
the grass held this failure in its mouth for years
4. beyond the grass birch trees hanker to return
to the open spaces they were chiseled out of
by Gaudens' Cape Cod Acropolis
and beyond the trees
are the hills that want to become mountains again
5. all the yearning ... the man scything who sees
the course of empire as he mows down summer grass
the woman who wipes the flour from her hands
and watches the white dust rise into the air
like seed
the girl lying on the grass near me
who dreams the sun fills her womb with children
6. the grass its yen to be stone stone hungry
for the fern fossils imprinted in the human palm
sun-struck trees and hills that want to be clouds

... this land is a state of mind that declares
its independence from the mother world each day

when cocks crow citizens stare at their hands
stunned to find themselves still in their bodies

PLAGUE

"London might well be said to be all in tears; the
mourners did not go about the streets indeed, for
nobody put on black, or made a formal dress of
mourning; but the voice of mourning was truly heard
in the streets; the shrieks of women and children at
the windows and doors of their houses, where their
nearest relations were, perhaps dying, or just
dead

-- Daniel Defoe, Journal of the Plague Year

grandfather laid with her
in his coal miner's shed
he paid flesh and she made
his face into the moon's

we did not want her to play
and tried to chase her off
with stones still she came
to size up our plump legs

she gave us her red badge
to pin on our cheeks father
nailed paper on the door
to drive her from the house

she stayed and we kept her
scars dwarfed limbs a wheeze
of breath that is her name
I hold her in my heart

she still can make it tick
or throb like a beserk clock
and my children play toward
the time she walks the streets

again with another name
that makes children go chill
and fathers will blame germs --
anything to explain her work

except embedded in seeds
we pass on father to son
the memory of her first kiss
steel hard drawing her home